



VIGILANCE ON THE MENU

The risks that agro-industry
must identify

Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et pour le Développement - Terre Solidaire



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The Law

MARCH 2017

France adopted the “duty of vigilance law”.

In March 2017, France adopted the “duty of vigilance law”. The legislative bill was introduced by three members of parliament and six NGOs – including CCFD-Terre Solidaire. This legislation, the first of its kind in the world, marked a historic step towards the protection of human rights and the environment. The law requires French companies employing more than 5,000 people in France or 10,000 people globally to exercise a **duty of vigilance** with regard to their actions and those of their subsidiaries and subcontractors. In accordance with this law, companies have a legal obligation to develop, publish and implement a vigilance plan based on an inventory of risks that the company poses to fundamental freedoms, health, human rights and the environment.

Two years after the law entered into force, CCFD-Terre Solidaire has noted that the measures implemented by companies are insufficient and do not meet legal requirements.

LAND AND WATER GRABBING

The seizing of land by companies has negative repercussions for local communities or those who originally used the land; it upsets the economic, social, societal and environmental equilibrium of these people and violates their rights. The appropriation of water resources causes a deterioration in biophysical conditions, such as water shortages as well as the denial of people’s human rights through, for example, the loss of access to a particular resource.



KEY FIGURES

Water scarcity is one of humanity’s most urgent problems: **1/5 of the world’s population** currently lives in areas where there is a **water shortage**, and the OECD predicts that in 2030, 40% of the global demand for water will not be met.

Between 2000 and 2016, **26.7 million** hectares of farmland were sold to foreign investors globally which is equivalent to an area bigger than the United Kingdom.

FARMERS’ RIGHTS AND CONTRACT FARMING

Contract farming is an agreement between a farmer and a company specifying the conditions of production for a given product on the farmer’s land. The contract grants the company exclusive ownership rights over the future output. The asymmetrical power balance between the farmers and the contracting firm can lead to unfair contracts.



KEY FIGURES

In Vietnam, more than **90% of cotton and fresh milk** is produced under contract farming. In Mozambique and Zambia, **100% of cotton and tobacco** is produced using the same model.

668,000 hectares of land used for traditional rice production was replaced by a Monsanto and Syngenta-led project in Vietnam, to grow hybrid corn for animal feed.

SEEDS AND BIODIVERSITY

By restricting agricultural and food options to a limited number of industrial seeds, the seed standardisation strategy of large seed companies directly threatens food sovereignty and biodiversity and reduces the chances of ecosystems adapting to new challenges such as extreme climate hazards or climate change. Moreover, the oligopoly formed by a small number of seed companies allows them to influence policies that determine the supply, production and sale of seeds, thus jeopardising the rights of farmers and peasants.


KEY FIGURES

Today, just **12 plant species** and **5 animal species** account for three-quarters of the world's food, and **5 species** (including rice, corn and wheat) account for nearly **60% of the calories and vegetable** proteins consumed by humans.

France is the **biggest producer** of seeds in Europe and the **number one global exporter** with a turnover of **1.6 billion euros** in 2017/2018.

PESTICIDES, HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Pesticides are used to repel, destroy or control pests and/or regulate plant growth. These chemical or biological substances can pose major risks for the environment and populations. They weaken ecosystems by causing the contamination of air, soil and water, and they endanger food production, for example by harming pollinators.

Human impacts are also important: 30% of pesticides sold in developing countries do not comply with international quality standards, thus increasing health risks. Populations and users are generally ill-informed or unaware of the dangers these products pose to human health and the environment.


KEY FIGURES

Pesticides dumped in water systems contribute to the creation of **dead zones** such as in the Gulf of Mexico, an area the size of Belgium.

25 million agricultural workers suffer from diseases linked to the use of pesticides.

THE CRIMINALISATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

A human rights defender is a person (or group) who expresses themselves in a peaceful way in order to protect human rights and environmental rights.

Through their work, defenders help identify, prevent and mitigate the economic, social and environmental impacts of business activities. They can also make companies legally liable for human rights violations or environmental damage caused by their activities. All over the world, human rights defenders face life-threatening risks on a daily basis, working under the threat of extrajudicial executions, kidnappings, surveillance, incrimination and intimidation as a result of their battle against huge economic interests.


KEY FIGURES

In 2017, the agro-food industry became the riskiest and most deadly sector for human rights defenders.

In 2018, **321** human rights defenders were **murdered** in 27 countries.

The agro-industry



Agro-food is the **largest industrial sector** in France.

Turnover:
180 billion euros in 2017.

France's ranking in agro-food exports:
2nd in Europe,
4th globally.

Food products exported in 2016:
44.2 billion euros.

As demonstrated by CCFD-Terre Solidaire's report "Vigilance on the Menu", it is imperative to ensure that the giants of the agro-food industry exercise their duty of vigilance in a genuine, transparent and comprehensive manner in order to identify, prevent and remedy the impact of their activities on human rights, the environment and people's food sovereignty.

CCFD-Terre Solidaire's advocacy

Shortcomings in the regulation of transnational corporations and the control of the agro-food sector have been the cause of many outrages since the beginning of the 21st century. In this context, CCFD-Terre Solidaire is fighting for legislation that requires companies to respect human rights and the environment. At the same time, CCFD-Terre Solidaire is advocating that small scale farmers and peasants should be given priority support.

In the absence of frameworks and regulations, the negative impacts of transnational corporations in the agro-industry are increasing: land and resource grabbing, destabilisation of local markets, unfair competition between small producers and transnational corporations, leading to the marginalisation of the most vulnerable populations. By working with the affected populations, our allies and human rights defenders in the countries involved, we are mobilising today to demand the full application of the duty of vigilance law in France, its extension at European level and the ratification of a United Nations treaty on transnational corporations and human rights.

CCFD-Terre Solidaire is thus making a dual advocacy to ensure that the actions of transnational corporations cease to damage people's food sovereignty.

As a long-term agent of change in over 60 countries, CCFD-Terre Solidaire takes action against all forms of injustice. We strive to ensure that the fundamental rights of all human beings are respected: eating one's fill, living with dignity, working in a healthy environment, choosing where to live one's life... A fairer and more united world is already underway because all human beings carry a force for change within them. Our commitment to greater justice and solidarity is rooted in the social thought of the Church. Through our individual and collective action, we offer and support both political and field solutions.



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